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WORKING PAPER NO. 52

Early Childhood Education Trajectories and Transitions: A Study of the Experiences and Perspectives of Parents and Children in Andhra Pradesh, India

July 2009

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Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iii
The Authors	iv
1. Introduction	1
1.1 India's Education for All commitments	2
1.2 Early childhood education in India	3
1.3 Pre-school and primary education in Andhra Pradesh	4
2. Studying early transitions through Young Lives	7
2.1 Survey and qualitative research methods	7
2.2 Evidence on pre-school and school enrolment	8
2.3 Observations of <i>Anganwadis</i> in Young Lives sites	11
2.4 Parents' views on quality and the choices they make for their children	11
3. Early education trajectories for Young Lives children	14
3.1 Trajectory 1: Government pre-school to government primary school	14
3.2 Trajectory 2: Home to private primary school (kindergarten)	18
3.2.1 High expectations	19
3.2.2 Early learning	19
3.2.3 English as medium of instruction	20
3.2.4 Good quality education	20
3.2.5 Corporal punishment	22
3.3 Trajectory 3: Government pre-school to private primary school (hostel or day school)	23
3.4 Trajectory 4: Government pre-school to government hostel	25
4. Discussion: Linking ECCE trajectories and transitions	26
References	30
Appendix 1	32

Abstract

This paper explores diverse pathways through early childhood in the context of Andhra Pradesh state, India. The particular focus is on experiences of pre-school and transitions to primary school. The paper is based on analysis of Young Lives survey data (n=1950) collected for a group of young children born at the beginning of the millennium, plus in-depth qualitative research with a small sub-sample (n=24). We start from the premise that children's earliest educational experiences can have a crucial influence on their lifelong adjustments and achievements. Superficially, the evidence from Young Lives research is quite positive, suggesting equitable access to early childhood provision as well as high levels of primary school attendance. However, overall percentages are misleading and disguise major differences in early transition experiences. Many of these differences are shaped by the co-existence of a long established network of government *anganwadis* under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, alongside a rapidly growing (relatively unregulated) private sector at both pre-school and primary levels. Parental decision making around private versus government education has been fuelled by the possibility of improved life opportunities in a rapidly changing economy and the attractiveness of English medium teaching, even at the earliest stages (more commonly available in the private sector). The paper identifies four quite distinct trajectories related to availability and choice of pre-school and primary school. Parental aspirations for individual boys and girls combined with beliefs about relative quality of government and private schools seem to shape individual trajectories in ways that seem likely to reproduce or even reinforce inequities related to wealth, location, caste and gender. The consequence for children is in many cases having to cope with multiple transitions during their early years, which may entail changing schools in an effort to 'up-grade' in perceived quality (e.g. from a government to private school), or moving into distant hostels or with relatives in order to attend better schools or to access grades unavailable locally.

Acknowledgements

This paper is part of on-going research within Young Lives into early childhood transitions. The early transitions stream within Young Lives is supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation which funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development and child rights (www.bernardvanleer.org). This paper is one of several within this line of research, including comparable case studies in Ethiopia and Peru. In addition, cross-country analysis examines the broad patterns across these varied contexts with the aim to understand how poverty shapes children's transition experiences. We would like to thank the children and families who participate in Young Lives research, as well as the teachers and headteachers who open their schools and classrooms to us. We would also like to thank the Indian team members Dr Hymavathi, Udaya and Priya for their support in data collection with the children, their families and other research participants. Natalia Streuli provided excellent ongoing research assistance for the paper.

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Young Lives is core-funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries, with sub-studies funded by International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Ethiopia, UNICEF in India, Irish Aid in Vietnam and the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood is globally acknowledged as one of the crucial phases of human development.¹ The early childhood years involve a succession of developmental transitions, including changes in children's physical, cognitive and emotional capacities. A critical aspect of this life phase is children's adaptations to new environments. This period often entails a series of transitions in the social lives of children as they move from the familiarity of their home environment to new public places, notably, pre-schools, kindergartens and schools.

Children's earliest educational transitions may be conceptualised as the beginning of a new phase of their personal development, as well as a change in their social status.² For many children, starting pre-school and school involves momentous changes in their lives. They simultaneously experience changes in their physical and social environments, language use, activities and learning, and expectations for behaviour. All of these factors carry potential to impact how children respond during these first major educational transitions (Fabian and Dunlop 2002; Dunlop and Fabian 2003; Vogler et al. 2008).

Children's earliest educational experiences are considered key to their lifelong adjustments and achievements. Children's experiences of their first transitions into school are understood to significantly affect how they navigate their future experiences of learning (Burrell and Bubb 2000). Accumulating scientific research over the last two decades convincingly demonstrates the potential of early childhood programmes to improve long term outcomes, especially for disadvantaged groups. For example, a review of eight centre-based early childhood interventions through pre-schools in Guinea, Cape Verde, Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal, Vietnam and Colombia, and expanded pre-primary schools in Argentina, noted consistent evidence of substantial effects on children's cognitive development (see Engle et al. 2007). Most of these studies also reported gains in non-cognitive skills such as sociability, self-confidence, willingness to talk to adults and motivation. In particular, longitudinal studies in Nepal, Argentina, Burma and Colombia recorded improvements in the number of children entering school, age of entry, retention and performance. A national evaluation of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) centres (NIPCCD 1992) and a longitudinal assessment of ECCD centres in India conducted by the National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT 1993) reveal that there are better rates of enrolment and greater retention in later school years among children with early childhood care and education experience as compared to those who directly enter Grade I.

Over the last decade significant policy attention has focused on access to early childhood care and education, especially in majority world contexts (i.e. developing economies). Goal 1 of the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All is to expand and improve 'comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children' (World Education Forum 2000). Recognising the potential significance of early learning, inability to access pre-school education has been

1 Following the working definition of General Comment 7 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 'early childhood' is understood as the period below the age of 8 (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2005: 2).

2 This is a so-called 'vertical' concept of transitions in that there is a shift from one stage to another which is recognised as upward mobility. 'Horizontal' transitions are routine movements between different domains of daily life (e.g. everyday movements between home and school) (Kagan and Neuman 1998: 366).

identified as the first 'Zone of Exclusion' from the goal of education for all (Lewin 2007). The Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2009) notes worldwide discrepancies in access and quality:

While coverage rates are increasing worldwide, early childhood services of good quality remain inaccessible to the majority of the world's children. This is especially true for children in the poorest countries – and for the most disadvantaged among them. The upshot is a perverse outcome for equity: those with the most to gain from ECCE are least likely to participate. (UNESCO 2008: 42).

Issues of access, equity and quality in three Young Lives countries (Ethiopia, India and Peru) have been explored by Woodhead et al. (2009), who note that research and policy attention on ECCE coincides with massive expansion of services, but that the benefits are not always felt by groups with the most to gain. UNESCO (2006) estimated a 300% increase globally in enrolment in pre-primary education since 1970. By 2005, the World Bank had financed loans to 52 developing countries for child development programmes, for a total of US\$1680 million (Engle et al. 2007). Over 30 governments now have national policies for Early Childhood Development and dozens more are being developed, while over 35 Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers now feature Early Childhood programmes, either through pre-school services, parenting programmes, child care facilities or other interventions (UNICEF 2007).

India has a relatively long history of policy and programming for ECCE at the national level. The declaration of the National Policy for Children in 1974 and the launch by the Government of India of the ICDS in the same year marked this country-wide initiative. Indeed, the ICDS, consisting of basic services including supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health check-ups and referral, pre-school education for children aged 3 to 6, and health and nutrition for mothers, was at the time the world's largest attempt to provide a package of services to the most vulnerable sectors of the population. As Mohite and Bhatt (2008) reflect, the development of early childhood services in India has long been conceptualised as an investment in human resource development and ICDS has been innovative in attempting to provide ECCE in an integrated way.

Despite the focus on integrated child development services, transitions to school are an under-researched area in India. This paper aims to contribute to filling this gap by examining how children and families experience transitions within early childhood education and primary school. It is organised into the following sections: a background description of India's early childhood education system with a special focus on the state of Andhra Pradesh; an overview of Young Lives longitudinal research on transition themes in Andhra Pradesh; an analysis of children's and families' different trajectories through ECCE; and a final discussion of implications for further considerations of ECCE and children's transitions in India.

1.1 India's Education for All commitments

India's constitution (1950) states in Article 45 that 'the state shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution [by 1960], for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years'. The constitution furthermore makes clear references to providing special care in service provision for those citizens of different spoken and/or written languages as well as for

underprivileged sectors of the general population, in particular the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.³ The education system in the country is guided by the National Policy on Education (NPE) which was initiated in 1968, consolidated in 1986 and further updated in 1992. The NPE 1986 provided for a comprehensive policy framework for the development of education. In recent years, the main programmatic vehicle for the achievement of the universalisation of elementary education, now by 2010, is called the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (Hindi for the 'Education for All' Movement, www.ssa.nic.in/).

Free education up to Class 10 has been introduced by a majority of Indian states and the present Central Government claims a 35% increase in budget allocation for school education during the period 2007-08. However, several analysts conclude that India is not investing adequate financial resources to provide quality education for all, as reflected in the trend of financial allocations made for elementary education through annual as well as five years plans (Drèze and Sen 1995; Tilak 2005).

India has seen a 5% increase in enrolments in primary schools between 1999 (110 million children) and 2005 (146 million) (UNESCO 2007). Universal primary education is now close to being achieved (net enrolment ratio 89% in 2005, UNESCO 2007). Even though developments in the recent past have had significant impacts on increasing the coverage of basic education, challenges remain to achieving the goal of reaching the almost 10% of children who are still out of school and providing good quality education (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay 2008). Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether India will achieve the goal it has set for itself, which is consistent with its commitments to the Dakar Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO 2000) and the Millennium Development Goal of providing universal primary education (United Nations 2000).

1.2 Early childhood education in India

As discussed above, India introduced a holistic concept of early childhood education and care through the introduction of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme in 1974, (a model influenced by HeadStart in the USA), including immunisation, growth monitoring, health and referral services as well as pre-school education. The ICDS scheme and (more recently) *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) recognise pre-primary learning as a significant input for a sound foundation for cumulative lifelong learning and development, although implementation of educational objectives has been limited within ICDS pre-schools (*anganwadis*), with the main emphasis on health and nutrition components (FOCUS 2006). Nonetheless, the stated policy is for the pre-school education component to be oriented

3 Scheduled Castes are the lowest in the traditional caste structure and were earlier considered to be 'untouchables'. In rural Andhra Pradesh, Scheduled Caste colonies are located separately, and in most cases away from the main villages. These colonies are named after the caste and even in the official records are often called *harijana wada*. They have been subjected to discrimination for years and therefore had no access to basic services, including education. National legislation aims to prohibit 'untouchability' and discrimination. A 15% reservation has been provided for the Scheduled Castes in education including colleges and universities, and government employment. Separate boarding hostels are provided for Scheduled Caste boys and girls to attend school and scholarships to promote higher education.

Scheduled Tribes are the indigenous people, living in and dependent on forests. Different groups of tribes live in different parts of Andhra Pradesh and vary in their culture, language and lifestyle. Though a good number of them are mainstreamed and live in plain areas, a considerable population continues to live in isolated hill tops and have little access to services. Areas with high tribal population are covered by a special administrative system through the establishment of the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA). Special provisions are made to promote education, health and sustainable livelihoods through the ITDAs. A 7% reservation is provided in educational institutions and government employment. Provision of boarding hostels for boys and girls to attend school, scholarships, training for jobs, job placements, etc., are some of the special services available to them.

toward providing a natural, joyful and stimulating environment for young children. India's National Policy on Education and Programme of Action suggest that programmes of ECCE be child-oriented, focused around play and the individuality of children. Formal methods and content for reading, writing and arithmetic are supposed to be discouraged at this stage. ECCE centres are instead supposed to promote general school readiness and overall development of 3- to 6-year-old children.

While ICDS has been the main government programme over more than three decades, the responsibility of providing ECCE services in India is currently shared by the government, private and not-for-profit sectors. What is on offer through each of these sectors differs greatly in terms of access, outreach, location, components and quality. While the government *anganwadi* services are free and the major provision for families in rural areas, the private sector initiatives are usually commercial ventures operating in the form of pre-schools, preparatory schools, play schools, nurseries, kindergarten schools and day care centres, especially in urban areas. During the last few years there has been a proliferation of private sector services to smaller towns as well as larger cities, reflecting growing demand (Das 2003). National and localised non-governmental organisations' initiatives in early childhood services are also available in India either through direct service delivery or through supportive activities that facilitate the delivery of ECCE.

The ICDS programme is sponsored and administered nationwide by each state government through 700,000 *anganwadi* centres, located in almost every administrative block in the country. *Anganwadi* literally means 'courtyard garden', but is used to denote a simple childcare centre, inferring that it could be run in the courtyard of any village home (Mohite and Bhatt 2008). The *anganwadi* is usually staffed by two local women, one who is the supervisor in the *anganwadi* and who has minimal formal training in ECCE and earns a small honorarium for her work, and another helper responsible for gathering or fetching children from their homes, earning her the title of *teragar* (the one who fetches).

Recent estimates put the number of children between the ages of 3 and 6 participating in ICDS centre-based pre-school learning activities at 10.2 million (Mohite and Bhatt 2008). Despite an increase in the number of pre-primary private schools in recent years, government and local bodies continue to be the main providers, managing 83% of registered pre-primary schools (GOI 2007, annex 2), although this statistic does not take into account the large numbers of unregulated private providers.

1.3 Pre-school and primary education in Andhra Pradesh

This working paper focuses on Young Lives research in Andhra Pradesh, which is India's fifth largest state. It has a population of about 76.2 million and an area of 276,754 sq. km., making it sizably larger in population than France and in area larger than the United Kingdom. It accounts for over 7% of India's population. While Andhra Pradesh continues to be largely rural with only 27% of the population living in urban areas, the state capital, Hyderabad, is one of the leading centres of the information technology (IT) revolution. Consequently, the state is witnessing a shift away from agriculture (which remains important at 30% of state domestic product) towards the service sector, which is expanding rapidly.

There is much diversity in terms of language, religion and caste among the people of Andhra Pradesh. About 85% of the population identifies Telugu as the mother tongue (the second most commonly spoken language in India), another 7.5% speak Urdu, and about 3% speak Hindi. A number of other languages are spoken by the remaining population, such as Tamil,

Kannada, Marathi, Oriya, etc. The dominant religion in Andhra Pradesh is Hinduism (75%) followed by Islam (11%) and Christianity (3.5%).

Education from classes 1 to 10 in Andhra Pradesh is provided by the Department of School Education. The objectives of the Department of School Education include: to provide access to education for all children between 5 and 15 years of age; to ensure the enrolment of children in schools; to ensure that children do not discontinue primary education; and to maintain quality standards in education within Andhra Pradesh.

At state level, government figures for 2006-07 indicate that 73% of all primary school aged children in Andhra Pradesh were enrolled in primary schools. Government figures from 2007-08 show variation in the kinds of schools in which children are enrolled (<http://ssa.ap.nic.in/>). The two main categories of school considered here are government and private, with variations within these categories based on who manages them. Table 1 indicates the quantity and types of primary school running that year in the state.

Table 1: *Primary schools by management in Andhra Pradesh, 2007-08*

	% total	Total
Government	86.8	54235
State government	7.78	4862
Municipalities in urban areas	2.23	1396
Local governments in rural areas (Mandal Praja Parishad./Zilla Praja Parishad)	76.7	47953
Central govt.	.038	24
Private	13.2	8229
Private aided	3.5	2246
Private unaided	9.5	5983
Total		62464

(Source: Government departmental data 2007-08, <http://ssa.ap.nic.in/>)

The figures above indicate the number of different types of schools (management-wise); however, it is interesting to see how children are spread across these differing school types (see Table 2):

Table 2: *Primary school enrolment by management type, Andhra Pradesh, 2007-08*

	% total	#
Government	60.3	3240634
State government	5.1	273999
Municipalities in urban areas	2.66	143158
Local governments in rural areas (Mandal Praja Parishad./Zilla Praja Parishad)	52.5	2818934
Central govt.	.08	4543
Private	39.6	2126315
Private aided	6.1	332011
Private unaided	33.4	1794304
Total		5366949

(Source: Government departmental data 2007-08, <http://ssa.ap.nic.in/>)

Most private schools in the state use English as the medium of instruction and this is one of the major factors attracting parents to these schools, in anticipation that their children will have better prospects for later education and employment in India's growing economy. Only 1.6% of the government schools in Andhra Pradesh are English medium. However, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has recently rolled out the SUCCESS programme (2008-09), which saw an initial 6,500 government schools transition to English medium instruction.

The growth of the private sector and the use of English versus Telugu as the medium of instruction have important impacts on children's education trajectories and transition experiences, as will be discussed later in this paper. The government has also introduced a 'Right to Education Bill' in recognition of the risk of socially divisive outcomes from the country's parallel private and government education systems. The bill confirms that free and compulsory education is a fundamental right for all children between the ages of 6 and 14. It also requires that 25% of places in private schools be reserved for disadvantaged children from the neighbourhood, and the fees reimbursed by the government.

The growth of residential hostels is another feature of the education system in Andhra Pradesh, as in the rest of India. These boarding hostels provide an opportunity for children to live away from home in order to pursue their education, including young children entering primary schools. The government provides hostels for specific disadvantaged groups of children, such as for children from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Castes.⁴ Admission to government hostels is limited to children from those particular castes and is competitive in the sense that long waiting lists for admission are not uncommon. There are also separate hostels for girls and boys. The entire expenditure for children admitted into these hostels is borne by the government. Children staying in a government hostel need not necessarily go to the same school, but they will be attending a government school. Private schools with hostel facilities generally locate their hostels on the school premises, and these hostels are an increasingly common part of children's early education transition experiences.

This introductory overview of the school system in Andhra Pradesh has already drawn attention to some of the key factors shaping children's transition experiences, notably the high (but not universal) attendance rates at pre-school and primary education, the co-existence of a very large private sector alongside the government schools, the trends in medium of instruction, and the function of boarding hostels. The consequence for children is that transitions involve negotiating a series of very different educational trajectories, with various key choice points encountered by families along the way. Identifying and tracking these trajectories became a major research focus for the Young Lives qualitative research team in Andhra Pradesh. The methods and initial findings are elaborated in the next section of this paper.

4 Backward Castes or Classes are people belonging to a group of castes who are considered to be backward in view of the low level of the caste in the structure. In Andhra Pradesh, the Backward Castes are further divided into four groups, and some caste groups are placed into each of these subgroups. Recently, the high court has ordered the inclusion of a fifth sub-group, and Muslims have been placed into this category. A 25 per cent reservation has been provided to the Backward Castes for purposes of education and government employment. Separate boarding hostels, scholarships etc are provided to promote education for these groups, as for the Scheduled Castes.

2. Studying early transitions through Young Lives

2.1 Survey and qualitative research methods

Young Lives is a long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in four developing countries – Ethiopia, Peru, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh) and Vietnam – over 15 years. The over-arching goal of the project is to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and examine how policies affect children's well-being, in order to inform effective policy development and targeting of child welfare interventions. A range of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, Policy Monitoring and Analysis (PMA) and Child Budget Monitoring (CBM) are used in the project to track, over a 15 year period, the lives and fortunes of children growing up in poverty in the four study countries.

The Young Lives study is designed to collect longitudinal data on two cohorts of children: 2,000 children in each country born in 2000/1 (Younger Cohort) and 1,000 children in each country born in 1994/5 (Older Cohort). The quantitative component of the research includes child and household surveys covering all 3,000 children in each country and their caregivers. The survey data was first collected in each country in 2002, and then again in 2006/7. Of the original Andhra Pradesh sample, 1,950 of the original Younger Cohort children were retained for inclusion in the second round of survey data collection. Young children's experiences of early childhood services, their transition to school and associated views on quality and expectations for the future were all included in the questionnaire to caregivers and provide baseline information for this report.

The large sample survey research has been complemented by in-depth qualitative study in selected Young Lives sites, with the first round of qualitative research carried out in late 2007. The qualitative research in Andhra Pradesh is based on a sub-sample of 24 case study children from the Younger Cohort (between the ages of 6 and 8 years at the time of the study) living in four communities. The selection of communities and children for the qualitative study was based on criteria such as diversity of region (urban, rural, tribal) and caste (including Schedule Castes and Backward Classes), parental existence (e.g., whether children were orphans or living with both or one parent, or other caregivers), whether children were attending school or not (for the Older Cohort), whether children had attended pre-school or not, and the type of school children attended (government or private).

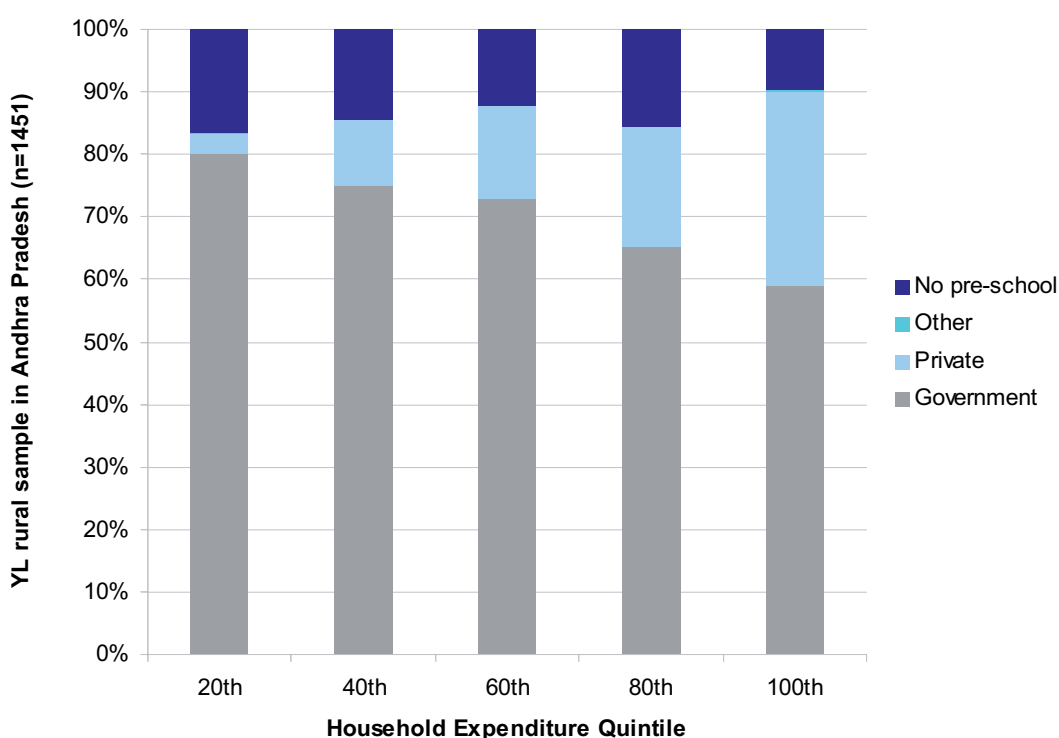
The methods used in all of the four sites selected for qualitative research were similar and included: individual interviews with children (both Older and Younger Cohorts), caregivers, and other key stakeholders/gatekeepers, such as teachers of pre-schools, primary schools and high schools, health workers and village heads (*sarpanch*); group-based interviews; focus discussion groups with caregivers and other key stakeholders such as teachers, staff of government hospitals and community representatives; participatory group exercises with children, both Younger (mixed) and Older (separately for boys and girls) Cohorts; and semi-structured observations in home, school and community settings. Analysis for this paper focused on information collected in interviews with children, caretakers, and school staff, and informed by observations made of eight *anganwadis* in the sub-sample communities. All names

of villages, children and caregivers have been changed to ensure anonymity of research participants. A brief description of the four qualitative research sites is provided in Appendix 1.

2.2 Evidence on pre-school and school enrolment

In Andhra Pradesh, 86.9% of the full Younger Cohort sample (1,694 children) were reported by their caregivers as having attended a pre-school of some kind at some time since the age of 3, and attendance rates are almost as high for rural as for urban samples (86% versus 90%). More detailed analyses of patterns of access have been carried out by Woodhead et al. (2009), which is the major source of survey data discussed here. Figures 1 and 2 are based on separate analyses for rural versus urban sites in Andhra Pradesh, in each case showing the links between poverty levels (measured by per capita household expenditure data) and type of pre-school attended. The sample was also divided into five quintiles (groups of equal size) according to per capita household expenditure.⁵

Figure 1. *Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels – Rural sample in Andhra Pradesh*



⁵ The Young Lives 'Expenditure Index' is based on data from Young Lives surveys of individual households and calculated as: 'Sum of the estimated value (approximated to the past 30 days i.e., a month), of food (bought + home grown + gifts/transfers) and non-food (excluding durables such as furniture, gold jewellery and one-off expenditure). [R2, HH questionnaire section 4] Divide this monthly figure by household size.'

Figure 2. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels – Urban sample in Andhra Pradesh

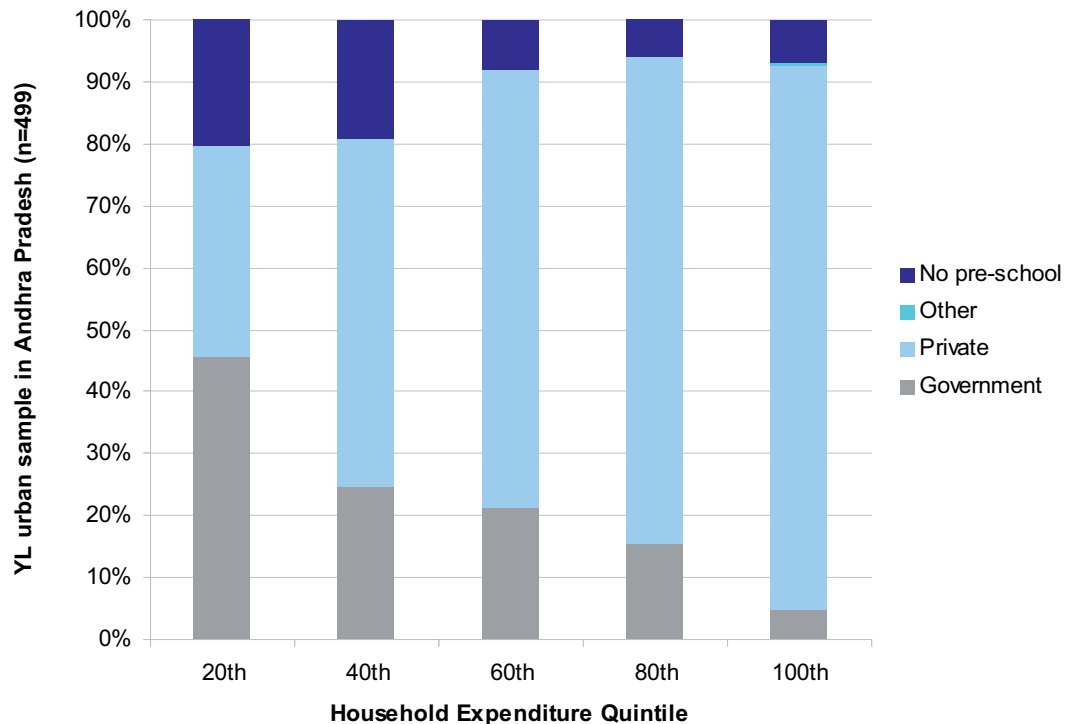


Figure 1 highlights the dominance of government provision (*anganwadis*) for children in rural communities, especially for the poorest households. It is only for some more advantaged groups that private pre-schools are a significant option, accounting for 31.1% of the children in the ‘least poor’ group. Parents have a greater choice of pre-schools in urban communities (Figure 2), and the private sector plays a very significant role. Not surprisingly, poverty levels are strongly predictive of whether children attend a government or a private pre-school. The latter account for 78.4% of children in the 4th expenditure quintile and 87.6% of children in the 5th expenditure quintile (the least poor groups), with only 15.5% and 4.8% children from these groups respectively attending government pre-school. By contrast, only 34.1% of the ‘most poor’ urban group attend a private pre-school, while more than 45.5% of ‘most poor’ children attend government pre-schools (Woodhead et al. 2009).

Young Lives survey data also identifies a trend for parents to move their children into private sector kindergartens and away from government *anganwadi* under the ICDS programme. In Andhra Pradesh, 123 caregivers (out of the 2,011 interviewed) reported that their child had attended more than one pre-school since the age of 3. In the great majority (101) of these cases, the caregiver reported the child had been moved from a government *anganwadi* to a private kindergarten.⁶

While gender did not appear to be a significant factor shaping access at this early stage in children’s school careers, analysis of choices for private versus government pre-schools reveals more subtle differentiation. Overall, girls are more likely to be educated within the government sector and expected to leave school earlier than their brothers. Evidence for these different trajectories comes from the Young Lives Older Cohort (12 year olds), with

⁶ Kindergartens are private pre-schools that are part of the formal schooling system. In this paper, the term is used to refer to private establishments, whilst pre-school refers to government institutions.

10% more boys than girls enrolled in private schools, and 68% of boys anticipating university education, compared to 54% of girls interviewed. Importantly, only 42% of girls' caregivers expected their daughters to progress to university.

The findings reported so far mostly relate to caregivers' reports on children's experiences of pre-school since age 3, when they were surveyed in 2006. But caregivers were also asked if their children had already started primary school. A surprising 44% of children were reported to have started school, even though only 20% of the sample had reached 5 years old in 2006, that is, the age at which children in Andhra Pradesh formally become eligible to enrol in primary education. Also, the poorest households were most likely to have enrolled their children to primary school, with 54% already attending primary school compared to only 33% of the less poor households (Galab et al. 2008). In part, this reflects the practice of earlier admission to government schools, whereas children in the private sector would still be in kindergarten at this age. But the attraction to the poorest families is also likely to be shaped by the provision of free midday meals in government schools (see Drèze and Goyal 2003 and a recent study using Young Lives data from Singh 2008). Additional analyses confirm the significance of pre-school choices as a gateway into long-term separated trajectories. Fifty per cent of children in government pre-schools were expected by their parents to transfer to government primary schools (or had already transferred). 27% were expected to transfer from private kindergartens into private schools. As we have already seen, these trajectories are strongly linked to poverty levels, but they are also linked to intra-household inequities, with boys and first-born children more likely to be selected for a private trajectory (Woodhead et al. 2009).

The statistics reported so far are based on Young Lives survey data with a relatively large sample (around 1,700 children) across Andhra Pradesh. One of the major overall findings is about the growing significance of the private sector in parental decision making for children's education, especially in urban settings where choice is available, and amongst relatively better-off families who are able to pay fees. These parental preferences for private over government pre-school as the perceived best option for young children were also confirmed when caregivers were asked about the quality of early childhood services used by their child. Private users rated the care and education received by their children much higher than government school users, across all poverty groups (Woodhead et al. 2009).

This large sample survey data provides the backdrop for more detailed analysis of trajectories and transitions, based on in-depth work with the sub-sample of 24 children, their caregivers and pre-school workers across four contrasting sites in Andhra Pradesh. In the rest of this section, we report observations made in a small sample of *anganwadis*. These help explain the choices being made by caregivers away from the government sector. We also summarise findings from in-depth interviews with children, parents and teachers around perceptions of quality. The findings from this small-scale qualitative component of Young Lives research offers a somewhat depressing picture of the current state of the ICDS programme, at least in the communities we studied, within the state of Andhra Pradesh. Caution is needed about assuming these findings apply more generally even within the state, never mind to the whole country. Having said that, our in-depth research does appear to confirm the trends observed from the large sample survey data. The ICDS programme has played a major role in combating under-nutrition and promoting general health and development amongst young children, and as general preparation for school. Many parents and teachers valued their child's attendance at *anganwadi* for these reasons, but it is also clear that expectations for early childhood are shifting, with a much stronger emphasis on educational goals. In this respect, *anganwadis* appear to be failing, a conclusion also drawn by larger scale studies within India (FOCUS 2006).

2.3 Observations of *Anganwadis* in Young Lives sites

Semi-structured observations were carried out in eight *anganwadis* as part of the fieldwork in 2007. They were variously located in small, rented rooms, old government buildings and private homes. The physical structures were generally of poor quality. For example, one *anganwadi* in Poompuhar functions in the *panchayat* (local village administration) office, which is located in a single, long hall with a variety of objects stored at either end of the room. Children attending this *anganwadi* use the central space of this hall to sit and play. The one *anganwadi* observed to be functioning relatively well in this study was located on the premises of a primary school.

In six of the eight *anganwadis* observed, play and learning materials were either not provided or, where they did exist, the *anganwadi* workers considered them too precious to allow the children to use. In seven of the eight *anganwadis*, (the exception being the model *anganwadi* at Mayurbhanj)⁷ the *anganwadi* workers preferred to keep the play and learning materials locked up at the centre or in their private homes. The seesaw play equipment sanctioned to another *anganwadi* in Poompuhar remains unassembled several years after it was provided. Neither the *anganwadi* worker nor the village head seem to be concerned.

The quality of *anganwadis* is highly dependent on the skills and commitment of the individual *anganwadi* worker who, along with the designated *anganwadi* helper (or *ayah/ayamma*), is responsible for most aspects of service enrolment and delivery. The eight *anganwadis* workers covered in this study were aged between 25 and 35 years, have done in-service training more than once and have a minimum of five to eight years of experience working in *anganwadis*. About half of them were engaged in other work in addition to being responsible for the *anganwadi*. They considered this necessary in order to supplement the meager income from the latter.

Young Lives has documented caregivers' concerns about the irregularity in the functioning of the *anganwadis*, the frequent staff absence, delay in supply of the nutrition supplement (flour made of pulses/wheat and sugar), and lack of an academic/formal teaching focus. These are seen to contribute to the poor quality of the *anganwadis*. This suggests that in practice, most of the norms set out in *The Minimum Specifications for Pre Schools* (a guide developed by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT 1996) which serves as a guideline for policy makers for laying down basic norms and specifications for ECCE) are far below the minimum standards.

2.4 Parents' views on quality and the choices they make for their children

Interviews with children's caregivers revealed some dissatisfaction with *anganwadis*, especially when comparisons are made with the quality of formal teaching and learning offered in private pre-schools. Some caregivers reported wanting to withdraw children from *anganwadis* to enrol them in private pre-school, but few were able to do so, presumably for financial reasons. A few families managed to make the shift. For example, Anita from the semi-urban tribal community Patna only briefly attended the local *anganwadi* before her parents enrolled her in the local private Telugu medium school into lower kindergarten. Long term, Anita's caregiver is keen on

⁷ This is where certain *anganwadis* in especially disadvantaged neighbourhoods are promoted as 'model *anganwadis*', receiving targeted support to improve basic infrastructure, increase teaching materials, toys and games, and encourage novel forms of learning.

seeking Anita's admission into a residential primary school run by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA). Anita's family doesn't feel she is quite ready for primary school, but they think the school offers good quality education and accommodation and the main costs will be met by ITDA. In fact, Anita's older sister is already enrolled in the hostel, perhaps another factor influencing the decision to eventually send Anita there.

Government schools do not normally admit children below the age of 5 years, but parents find creative solutions to obtaining education for their children as early as possible. Parents with resources to do so choose to enrol their children in private schools which will accept children as young as 3 years into lower and later upper kindergarten classes. One of the government primary school teachers participating in a collective interview in rural Poompuhar explained why children who had attended private pre-school before transitioning to primary school arrived better prepared than children who attended government *anganwadi*: 'The child would have been in school for two years by then [in lower and upper kindergarten] and learnt a number of things. The parents take pride in this and prefer to send their children to private schools.'

This option, as we have seen, applies especially in urban areas. However, in many rural and tribal areas, *anganwadis* are the only local pre-school options available to most children. In cases where only *anganwadis* are available, a few parents are able to send their young children to live with other relatives residing near private pre-schools or in hostels. A more common solution observed in the rural communities is to send children to the local government primary school informally until they are formally enrolled into Class 1, which was also confirmed by survey statistics reported earlier. For example, Manoj from the rural community Poompuhar attended the *anganwadi* for about six months before being sent to the local government primary school when he was just 3 or 4 years old, two years before he attained the minimum eligible age of 5. He was formally enrolled into Class 1 in that school only after reaching 5 years of age. His caregivers preferred this arrangement to leaving him in the *anganwadi* because they believed he would learn more in the primary school. As his mother stated, 'This [*anganwadi*] is only to play and there is no education there. The ANM [Auxiliary Nurse Midwife] also suggested enrolling him there [primary school].'

These quality concerns weren't just expressed by parents. Some children also reported being dissatisfied with the quality of their *anganwadis*. In comparing her *anganwadi* pre-school experience with her current government primary school experience, Shanmuka Priya, a young girl from rural Poompuhar, had this to say:

Interviewer: Which school do you like: *anganwadi* or the present school?

Shanmuka Priya: I like the present one only.

Interviewer: Why, dear?

Shanmuka Priya: Ah, because sirs [teachers] take care of us.

Interviewer: During the days of your education in *anganwadi*, did you like it or not?

Shanmuka Priya: I did not like it; nobody is there. There is only one old lady [*aayamma*, the helper at pre-school]. She serves food, and sends us off.

Interviewer: Does not the teacher come?

Shanmuka Priya: No, the teacher does not come. She does not teach.

However, in the absence of another alternative, most rural parents enrol their children in the local *anganwadi*. They seem to be satisfied that there is a place where the children can go to

when they are away in the fields and that their readiness for starting school is enhanced. As one caregiver from a tribal community in Patna explained, 'if the children are in the home, they will become dull, so by joining them in the school [*anganwadi*], they will develop intelligence. ... yes, it would become a habit'. Chandani's mother provided details of what she expected of an *anganwadi* in terms of preparing a child for school:

Interviewer: Children like Chandani were attending to the *anganwadi*, isn't it? How is it useful to them or to Chandani?

Chandani's mother: Teachers are organising for playing, singing. So all these are useful. That's all.

Interviewer: But before going to school there, were they learning anything or is it better to join them in *anganwadi* or is it better to join them to school or first joining them in the *anganwadi* then to school is it better?

Chandani's mother: First send them to *anganwadi* then sending them to school.

Interviewer: Why do you say like that?

Chandani's mother: Means they can learn to go to school, it becomes a habit that's why.

By contrast with parents' and childrens' views, primary school teachers working in the government school system were more positive about the potential contribution of pre-schools, including *anganwadis*, in facilitating children's transitions to primary school. Several primary school teachers observed that children who attended pre-school adjusted better and quicker to their new primary school environments, and were also quick to perform well. This view came out clearly in a collective interview with government primary school teachers in the tribal site of Patna. Their documented statements include:

- *Anganwadi plays a vital role in preparing the child for the primary school.*
- *Children's learning starts at the pre-school and contributes to improving their oral skills in the form of reciting rhymes, identifying, pronouncing, etc.*
- *The learning at the primary school which starts at Class 1 is a continuation of the process initiated at the pre-school level. The focus here is more on language development, writing and numerical skills. It can therefore be said with evidence that there is a difference between children who attend anganwadi and those who don't. Children who did not attend the pre-school or anganwadi are facing difficulty in writing and learning alphabets and words. They are unable to read like the children who attended the pre-school. They are less interactive, slow in adjustment to the new school environment and socialise less, at least up to the first quarter of the new year at school. They are at a relatively low level of performance when compared to the other children who come from pre-school.*

(Collective interview report with teachers, Patna community)

3. Early education trajectories for Young Lives children

In this section we look in more detail at the diverse trajectories experienced by the qualitative study's sub-sample of 24 children. At the time of the initial fieldwork, 2007, all but one child had already enrolled in primary school. The experiences of these 23 children's may be classified into four different trajectories. Twelve of the children in the sub-sample had made the conventional transition, from home to government pre-school, *anganwadi*, and then into local government primary school (Trajectory 1). A further ten children were attending private primary school, and they had arrived via two trajectories: from home direct to kindergarten class in private primary school (Trajectory 2); or from home to government pre-school, *anganwadi*, and then to private primary school (Trajectory 3). Finally, one child in the tribal community had attended government pre-school, *anganwadi*, and then moved to a special government primary school under the ITDA programme, which required living in a hostel (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Young Lives Trajectories to Primary School (Younger Cohort) (n=24*)*

	School Trajectory	# children
1	Government pre-school, <i>anganwadi</i> , into local government primary school	12
2	Home to private primary school	6
3	Government pre-school, <i>anganwadi</i> , to private primary school	4
4	Government pre-school, <i>anganwadi</i> , to government hostel primary school	1
	*One child not yet started primary school	1
	Total children=	24

The next section describes in more detail how these trajectories have been experienced by children and their families.

3.1 Trajectory 1: Government pre-school to government primary school

Tejaswini, a 7-year-old girl from rural Poompuhar, attended the government pre-school located in her home community for about two years before she was admitted into Class 1 in the local government primary school. Tejaswini's caregivers decided that the local government school was good enough for her. While still enrolled in school, Tejaswini also occasionally works with her parents. Her older sister (12yrs) hardly went to school and works for wages in the cotton fields. The future rounds of the Young Lives research will track whether this girl stays in school and continues her agricultural work or leaves one of these activities.

Children who experience this trajectory commonly attended the government pre-school, *anganwadi*, for a period of one to two years before seeking admission into the local government primary school. Equal number of boys and girls fall into Trajectory 1, with relatively more children (half from each community) from the rural and tribal sites when compared to the one urban site (two of the six children). In the latter, there are many options available to children and caregivers within the vicinity and at a reasonable cost.

Seven of the twelve children who experienced Trajectory 1 were from the poorest households in the sub-sample. Their families reported carrying out daily wage labour (either in agriculture or in construction work) as their main source of income. Households of the other children who experienced Trajectory 1 did have some land and do their own cultivation, in which the mothers are also engaged. This concentration of children from the poorest rural families in Trajectory 1 confirms the survey data reported earlier, and suggests that the government pre-school and primary school option may be the only for the poorest households, in view of their inability to meet the costs of private education.

Some children from less poor households also followed Trajectory 1 (although none from the least poor quintile). In such cases it seems it is the convenience provided by the local availability of the school that influences parents' decisions, rather than cost. As the children are still young, parents say they prefer their children to attend a local school which is considered 'good enough', rather than having children travel long distances to attend a private school. The quotes from an interview with Shanmukha Priya's caregiver (Poompuhar) draws attention to the fact that parents may enrol their children in the local government school in spite of not being satisfied with the quality:

Interviewer: What do you think about Shanmukha Priya's education? Is she regularly going to school, or...?

Shanmukha Priya's mother: She goes regularly, the day she goes to school they don't teach on that day. We go to school and drop her there, after lunch they play as they wish in the school. Sirs [teachers] don't teach well, hence they play the whole day, but this is the only school in this village.

Interviewer: When was Shanmukha Priya admitted into the school in our village?

Mother: It's one year now.

Interviewer: For how many years was Shanmukha Priya in *anganwadi*?

Mother: She went for one year and later joined the regular school, yes, first class. Neither are they taught well, nor is the class completed.

Interviewer: Did you speak to the teachers at any time?

Mother: We tell them now and then but it is of no use. Sometimes, we go and tell them in the school. We also talk to the teacher from the village [*vidya* volunteer]. But there is no use. The primary school is particularly bad. The teachers are different for high school and this is better. The headmaster for the primary school hardly comes to the school. As such, the teachers do not take their job seriously. Even the local teachers do not go regularly. They keep doing all other jobs. We watch them in the village.

Interviewer: Did you speak to the teachers about poor quality of teaching and detaining her in the same class?

Mother: Even if asked, they say that they are teaching, and give so many justifications. They keep giving the same answer.

Interviewer: Earlier she went to *anganwadi*. Do you think that must have helped her in preparing to regular school? Did she get used to going to school?

Mother: She got used to, she is going regularly now. She will be in school until afternoon, then plays with the children and they don't object. The teachers are not strict and the children are not afraid of them. What can we do? We come in the late evening after working in the field. We hardly get time to talk to the teachers or go to the school.

The decision to enrol Shanmukha Priya in the local government school is probably also influenced by the tradition of only educating girls up to the level available within the community. Adolescent girls have not usually been sent outside the community to continue their education. As such, there is hardly a girl there who is educated beyond Class 10. Before there was a high school in the village, girls could study in the village only up to Class 7. Since the school was upgraded to a high school a couple of years ago, many girls now study up to Class 10.

There appear to be a number of factors affecting the choice of a child's school. These include parental education and the household's economic status, as well as the availability and access of education services. Based on information collected in the Young Lives household survey on literacy levels, we see that for caregivers participating in the qualitative sub-study, mother's educational level may be a factor influencing decisions around school choice. Concerning Trajectory 1, it was found that eight of the twelve mothers of children in this category were illiterate, while the most education any of the mothers had was up to Class 10. Educational levels of fathers of children in this category are also relatively low, with five of the twelve fathers reporting being illiterate. Only one father graduated secondary school while the others have studied up to Classes 6 to 9. The findings from our study are consistent with previous studies (Woodhead et al. 2009), which suggest that mothers' education (measured in years completed) is strongly predictive of preference for private versus government services, especially in urban areas.

Children and their caregivers reported children experiencing significant adjustments to the new and longer primary school schedules, physical forms of discipline and punishment, including beating by teachers, and having to write a lot. Children expressed mixed feelings about these changes and their new schools in general. For example, in an interview with Shanmukha Priya, she talks at one point about liking her new primary school and at another point about not liking it, the liking and disliking being due to different reasons:

Interviewer: Shanmukha Priya, are you going to school? Which class are you in?

Shanmukha Priya: I am going; first.

Interviewer: Do you like school?

Shanmukha Priya: Yes, I like writing.

Interviewer: What else do you like about your school?

Shanmukha Priya: Nothing else.

Interviewer: Tell me, why are you going to the big school?⁸

Shanmukha Priya: (Pause for two seconds.) Me? If I don't go to school my sir [teacher] will beat me.⁹ That's why I go everyday.

Interviewer: Don't you like to go to school?

Shanmukha Priya: Ah ha. [No.]

Interviewer: Don't you like going to school everyday?

Shanmukha Priya: I don't.

8 Primary school is locally referred to as the 'big school' in contrast to the pre-school.

9 The word used is *tantaru*, which literally means to kick (but used loosely to mean 'beat').

Interviewer: But why, dear?

Shanmukha Priya: I don't like it. Sir will beat me. That's why I don't like it.

Interviewer: Did sirs beat you any time?

Shanmukha Priya: They beat us.

Shanmukha Priya's mother further described the difficulties her daughter experienced in her transition from pre-school to primary school:

Interviewer: Let us now talk about your child's school and related experiences. Last year, you have enrolled her here in the primary school, right? Did she go happily or did she cry? Was there any problem for her?

Shanmukha Priya's Mother: It was a trouble for her, she had the problem. She used to say that, 'sirs beat' and she felt troubled. We used to tell her some comforting stories and send her to school. She used to go crying and never happily because she did not like to go.

Interviewer: Why did it happen? Why did she feel like that?

Mother: I think it's because she had a joyful learning in *anganwadi*, but all of a sudden she was in a regular school. It is for longer period in the school. The teachers should make her sit in the school. It was like 'rest' there in the *anganwadi*, but here it is studying and writing. She can't sit at one place for long as she is so used to moving around. They make her sit here, in the class room. The child cries for some reason or the other, but we sent her, though the problem continued.

Interviewer: From her days at *anganwadi* to the present school, what change did you notice in her?

Mother: We think she writes well now. She is comparatively better.

Interviewer: What do you think, how did it change?

Mother: I mean, now she sits in the school for some time. It may be because of that that she is able to write. She is afraid of teachers and obeys them.

Interviewer: Is it, did she ever tell you that?

Mother: She says that teachers beat her if she is late to school, hence wants to be on time. She is a little more responsible now. She goes again, but she does not attend the afternoon classes. Instead she goes to the *anganwadi*. She says that they don't beat her. The teachers will not be in the school in the afternoon.

This same girl has an interesting way of managing her transition from pre-school to primary school. Even while attending primary school, Shanmukha Priya still goes to visit her previous *anganwadi* every afternoon. There, she collects the nutritional supplement and plays with other children. Interviews with the *anganwadi* workers suggest that several children admitted into primary school within the community often visit the *anganwadi* during the first few months of their admission into Class 1. The practice of continuing to go to the *anganwadi* even while regularly attending primary school seems a way that children like Shanmukha Priya cope with the new changes they are expected to adjust to in their transitions to primary school, although this is not an institutionalised link between *anganwadi* and primary school.

As this case demonstrates, children's transitions from a local pre-school to a local primary school can imply significant adjustments, resulting in mixed feelings toward the new school and necessitating various coping mechanisms. This transition is not experienced as merely a

physical move from one institution to another, even if these are both familiar settings located in the same community. Rather, the different approaches to, and content of, education in pre-schools and primary schools are important factors affecting children's transitions. In particular, the introduction to new forms of discipline and punishment, and specifically those that are physically violent, in government primary schools, as well as longer days of formal schooling, are experienced by children as major challenges.

3.2 Trajectory 2: Home to private primary school (kindergarten)

Dilshad lives in Polur, a Muslim community in the state capital Hyderabad. She is the only daughter and the youngest in the family, with eight older brothers. Her family is very poor, in the poorest of the Young Lives sample's five household categories (quintiles). The family lives in a one-room rented house with few utilities. Dilshad's father is a rickshaw puller and her mother works as a maid servant. Both parents are illiterate. Dilshad's brothers are all much older than her and no longer in school. Her parents are keen to do the best they can for their youngest child's education. Dilshad did not go to *anganwadi* but did briefly attend government primary school, before her parents moved her to a private English medium school.¹⁰ According to her mother, 'In government school they do not teach properly like in private school. Children are enrolled there in government school because of the food facility [supplementary nutrition programme]'.

(Source: Caregiver interview, Polur)

Children in Trajectory 2 have entered a private school directly from home. At the time of the qualitative sub-study in 2007, the six children in this trajectory had already begun school before attaining the age of 5, having been enrolled in lower and upper kindergarten in private schools before transitioning to Class 1 in these private schools. (In most private schools, lower and upper kindergarten involve formal instruction, which is not the case for *anganwadis*. The school hours for lower kindergarten are restricted to a half day.) Technically speaking, these children were in pre-school during their lower and upper kindergarten years, as they were attending a school between 3 and 5 years of age. However, experientially, these children have already been incorporated into the 12 year formal school system, rather than having a separate pre-school experience, and therefore their exposure (with more formal learning content, methods and hours of school) and experiences differ.

More children (four of six) from Polur, the urban community, have experienced Trajectory 2. One child from the rural community (Mayurbhanj) and one child from the tribal community (Patna) also entered a private primary school straight from home. It is interesting to note here that twice as many boys than girls (four compared to two) fall into this category. Half of all the children in this category belonged to the less poor group of households and the others to the middle poverty group. This suggests that in general the most poor do not send their children to private schools, although there are a few exceptions.

Children's admission into these private schools is a strategic choice made by parents who have sufficient resources to pay fees, or who are able to take out loans. These parents have high expectations for the outcomes of education and are influenced by factors such as private schools' opportunities for affording an early start to children's formal learning,

10 Dilshad's parents pay 80 rupees (approx. a little over £1) per month for her enrolment in this private school.

perceived better quality of education and English as the medium of instruction. Each of these influences is discussed below.

3.2.1 *High expectations*

Some parents expressed high expectations of their children's education contributing to a better quality of life than their own. To realise this expectation, these parents favour sending children to private schools from an early age. In this study, caregivers often talked of providing children with 'lives' that are different from their own, meaning, for example, not being in the same occupation as their parents or not having to work as hard their livelihood. Starting education early and ensuring that this education is of good quality and in the English language were leading factors that led caregivers to choose private primary schools for their children.

Sahithi's mother talks of her aspirations for her child:

Sahiti's Mother: But... I don't want my children to suffer like we did, I don't want them to suffer.

Interviewer: Well, she is a girl, the only girl you have, do you have any fears associated with a female child?

Sahiti's Mother: We have to go with the times and get them educated and let them be employed. I have absolutely no fears; I am confident that the girl can be self reliant (*dhairyamga; evari meeda aadhara padakunda*), to stand on her own feet. When she is grown up, I want her to be settled in Hyderabad or in any big city. If she is in a very big city then the child can be very happy. There will be a change in environment, there will be a lot of facilities and she can be comfortable to attend to every one and things will be at her disposal. In case there are guests she need not be uncomfortable and be at ease and be very comfortable.

(Source: Interview with Sahiti's mother, Mayurbhanj)

3.2.2 *Early learning*

Many caregivers wanted children to start learning early so that they would be well prepared for their entry into formal school. *Anganwadi*, which has little educational content, is not viewed as a proper pre-school in this sense. The mother of Aziz, an urban child, for example, considers it important to send her son to school as early as possible, so that he learns well. Therefore, the private school became the preferred option. Aziz's mother admitted him into the school at the age of 2.5 years and at the time of this data collection Aziz was in Class 1. In response to being asked if it was necessary for children to start school that early, his mother said, 'Yes. They will learn fast. Otherwise they will be at home'. She also referred to him learning something before he started primary school, so that he would be ready for Class 1:

Interviewer: I am asking whether the child should be sent directly to first class or he should go through nursery, lower kindergarten and upper kindergarten?

Mother: Because he was not studying properly, to learn in a better way...

Interviewer: Hu..., generally people say there is no need to send the child to lower kindergarten and it's better to admit the child directly in first standard.

Mother: Yes. They say. If the child doesn't know how to study, it's of no use; if they do not study it's of no use.

Interviewer: So do you think that it's better to go through lower kindergarten, upper kindergarten and then to first class, and it's better?

Mother: Yes, then he will study properly in the first class.

(Source: Caregiver interview, urban Polur)

3.2.3 *English as medium of instruction*

English medium is an important factor influencing parental decision. As discussed in the above sections, government schools rarely provide English as the medium of instruction (1.6% of the total government schools in Andhra Pradesh do so). Therefore many parents prefer private schools.

Dilshad's mother, for instance, preferred to move her daughter from one private school to another, explaining: 'There it is in Telugu. She could not learn Telugu, so now we joined her in English.' In the process, Dilshad had to repeat Class 1.

Sahithi's mother not only talks of the importance of studying in English, but also takes pride in Sahiti's ability to speak in English, unlike many other children in the community:

Interviewer: Then, you told us that the teachers are fine here and all your enquiries turned out positive. What do you think is the difference between government teachers and these teachers?

Mother: Well, they teach everything in English.... They speak only in English. They discipline them well. They are friendly and caring. They teach well. Children learn well. They are scared of teachers; like the teacher might scold, like the headmaster might scold. The children have fear in them. In case they don't study, like if they don't say their lessons properly, the children are scolded a bit... The teachers feel that children ought to learn well. They motivate the children. They want to get a good name for themselves and let the children make mark [good grades] and they teach with this intention.

(Source: Interview with Sahiti's mother, Mayurbhanj; rural community)

As has already been mentioned, in response to the growing demand for English language instruction, as evidenced by the above statements, the Government of Andhra Pradesh decided to introduce English medium in 6,500 government schools from the academic year 2008-09 via the SUCCESS programme.

3.2.4 *Good quality education*

Both children and parents generally consider private schools to be of better quality in terms of the attention that is paid to the children, the regularity in the conduct of classes, the teaching methodology and the learning outcomes. While the children who experience this trajectory (home to private primary school) belong to the less poor groups in the Young Lives sample, and their families are therefore in a relatively better position to meet the expenses of private schools, these costs can still be significant for these families. For example, Sahiti, from rural Mayurbhanj, attends a private school and stays in the hostel which costs 9,000 rupees per academic year (equivalent to around £130). Her family's livelihood relies on rain-dependent, dry land agriculture on their farm; living in one of the most drought-prone districts in the state, their yields are often uncertain. The family is fortunate to receive support from Sahiti's maternal grandmother's family. When Sahiti's mother was asked if they were comfortable paying the school and hostel fees, she responded:

That doesn't matter. As long as she is studying well, it doesn't matter how much money we spend upon it; we are determined to do it. We didn't study, so her father is thinking of educating her completely. We are all thinking of it.

(Source: Interview with Sahiti's mother, Mayurbhanj)

In the same interview, perceived school quality is cited as an important reason for sending Sahiti to study in the private hostel:

Interviewer: But why did you opt for this school? Did you consider its proximity? If not, why?

Sahiti's Mother: Yes. And the education is also very good. The environment of the school is also very good. It is a very silent and very studious place. They also teach very well. We don't have any problems with the food facilities too. We enquired about every thing before leaving the child.

(Source: Interview with Sahiti's mother, Mayurbhanj)

Caregivers and children talked of the poor quality of government schools as a reason for preferring private schools. Children described the better quality of private schools compared to government schools in terms of better infrastructure, better teaching methods and learning material, and having new and different resources like computers and playgrounds with a variety of play equipment. Whilst most government schools observed had relatively better physical structures and sufficient space for playgrounds than the private schools, this is only true with regard to physical space and buildings; furniture (tables, chairs and benches) and teaching and learning materials were observed to be better in private schools. Physical infrastructure appears to be traded for a more desirable curriculum and pedagogy in parents' minds. For better learning outcomes, parents and children are willing to make a compromise on space and buildings and rate private schools better in terms of quality. Aziz, attending a private English medium school in urban Polur, talks of the 'small chairs and long, long benches, carom board to play and the computer' which are available in his school. Such facilities were rarely observed to be available in any government schools. Children who had been moved from school to school had a basis for comparison, and spoke of varying quality amongst private schools and between private and government schools.

Another aspect of school quality that was highlighted in this research was the value caregivers associate with schools' monitoring of children's presence. Likhitha is a girl enrolled in a private English medium school 30 kilometers from her rural home community, Poompuhar. She stays with her grandmother while attending this school. In explaining the factors for choosing this school, Likhitha's mother discusses the better quality of her current school compared to the government school which she had attended for a short period. Ensuring children's attendance at school is another important factor that is valued by Likhitha's mother, and by many other caregivers, particularly in rural communities where children are often managing on their own while their parents are at work.

Interviewer: Why did you join her in a school which is so far off?

Likhitha's Mother: She was not going to school regularly when she was here. We go for work and we do not know if she is going to the school or not. She keeps playing with the other children in the village. That's why we joined her there. Here, she did not go to the school. If we forced her she used to go one day, and be absent on the other day. The teachers also did not bother about this. She is not going regularly, so we sent there. This year only we enrolled her there.

Interviewer: Here in this school how do they teach? Do you have any idea about how they teach in your village school?

Mother: We don't know. At that time they did not teach properly. Sir does not come regularly. That's why we sent her there.

(Source: Interview with Likhita's mother, Poompuhar)

Social structures and dynamics may also influence parent's decisions around schooling. One of the girls from rural Mayurbhanj belonged to a Forward Caste,¹¹ though most families in the community were of the Backward and Scheduled Caste population. Her mother believed that her daughter should not attend the same school as the other children in their community, but she insisted it was her daughter's choice, claiming the girl did not want to mingle with children of other castes, as they are 'dirty'.

3.2.5 Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment was frequently reported as being part of daily life in private schools, as it is in government schools. We mention it here because the use of strong discipline was often referred to by parents as a positive reason for choosing private schools. Not surprisingly, children who were physically beaten by teachers described disliking it and for some it created fear towards their schools and their teachers. Aziz, mentioned above, for example, talks of his experience in his private school where teachers use corporal punishment to discipline the children:

If being mischievous, they beat. While eating sitting down, if the food falls (in low tone). If the food falls, they tell us to pick up. 'It will fall on you, pick up,' they say. They say and beat badly. Again they beat.

Most parents said they do not mind the use of corporal punishment in their children's schools and they do not question the teachers' use of it. Rather, these parents regard it as something teachers need to do in order to teach well and discipline pupils. In responding to a query about how the Class 1 teacher should behave, Sahithi's mother said: '[She] has to teach well, discipline children; she should teach well. Tell how to be good, treat all children equally, teach in such a way that they will answer spontaneously.' In identifying the most preferred quality in a Class 1 teacher, she said, '[she] should teach well, she should make them disciplined, by beating them if they don't listen'.

While parents do not report questioning teachers' use of corporal punishment, in their interviews, several of them reported making enquiries into how their children were performing at school. It was noted that caregivers who send their children to private school reported visiting the school and enquiring about their education more than those whose children attended government schools.

11 A Forward Caste is a high caste. These are not covered by the reservation policy and do not have set quotas for political representation. Belonging to a high caste is a source of power in the rural communities.

3.3 Trajectory 3: Government pre-school to private primary school (hostel or day school)

Revanth is attending a private, English medium school, which has a hostel facility, serving children in the surrounding 15 to 20 villages. The hostel is located on the school premises, and therefore children are not required to travel long distances daily in order to access private English medium education. There is a small playground with limited equipment, but more than is available in the village's government school. Revanth used to attend one of the village *anganwadis*, but his parents were very disappointed by the poor quality. As his mother stated:

What is there? She [the anganwadi worker] doesn't know anything. She doesn't know which children are registered in the anganwadi and which are not. ... She comes to anganwadi, stays for some time with the children who turn up on that day, and then leaves. Sometimes she doesn't come. Only ayah [the helper] manages. ... They don't even look after the children. If she comes that's it, they sit... and both of them talk with each other.

Revanth's parents soon decided to enrol him in a private school as soon as they could afford it and so Revanth only attended the local village primary school for a short period.

(Source: Interview with Revanth's mother, rural Poompuhar)

Children in Trajectory 3 face one of the most challenging trajectories, involving moving between government pre-schools and private primary schools in a different language medium (Telugu to English). In several cases, transition to school also required them to leave their families and attend a hostel school even at the age of only 6 or 7 years. Three of the four children in this trajectory are from the same rural site, Poompuhar. These three children initially attended a government pre-school (*anganwadi*) in their home communities, followed by the local government primary school, for a couple of months before shifting into English language private schools. The reasons for parents' educational decision-making are similar to those discussed for Trajectory 2, namely English-medium instruction and overall perceived quality. Indeed, it has been a recent practice in Poompuhar for parents to carefully manage children's early childhood transitions by first sending them to the local pre-school, which is easily accessible within the community, and once the children are considered familiar with going to school and therefore prepared for 'real' school, they are enrolled in private schools. As one mother from rural Poompuhar described, 'In our village the teachers are not good. We just send them [to *anganwadi*] so that they get used to the routine of going to school.' Vishnu's caregivers talk of their decision to enrol him in a private school which would require him to move to a hostel:

Vishnu's father: They don't teach well here, that is the reason we have to enrol him there, in that private school.

Interviewer: Hence, you have enrolled him there. Are there many parents in the village who have admitted their children there, or are you the only parent?

Father: We are ten families who have admitted children there.

(Source: Interview with Vishnu's caregivers, Poompuhar)

Interestingly, the children who first attend *anganwadis* and later private primary schools lose a year or two in their educational trajectory as the private schools require their enrolment in kindergarten. As these children have been through the government pre-school in the Telugu

(regional language) medium, private schools consider it necessary for these children to repeat lower and upper kindergarten which are taught in English. It is said that this prepares them for the new Class 1, as this class will be conducted in a new language, with a new syllabus and a new schedule at a new place.

As a result of this management of children's early education trajectories, those in this category experience multiple transitions into primary education, arguably more so than children discussed in the previous two categories. They also lag behind by a class or two compared to their counterparts in Trajectory 1. However, this seems to be an acceptable trade-off as far as parents are concerned, as long as the children are in private English medium primary schools, and therefore on what they see as the 'right' track. Further investigation into how these children cope with this number of changes and how it affects their primary school performance would be an interesting area for future research.

While children in Trajectory 2 (home to private primary school) have been tuned to the academic schedule at the private school right from the start of their education experience, those in Trajectory 3 face the situation for the first time after having experienced a relatively free schedule at the *anganwadi*. The long hours at their new private schools, with extra tuition provided as early as six in the morning and finishing as late as eight in the evening, with only small intermittent breaks for food and play, makes the first few months at the new school environment a potentially difficult period for the young children. Yet, the full schedule, including hours of extra tuition, is one of the aspects of these private schools which is highly valued by children's caregivers.

Our study of children's experiences of Trajectory III within the Young Lives sub-sample, drew attention to another growing feature of early transitions – moving away from family into hostels linked to the schools. In addition to a new school curriculum and language medium, children in Trajectory 3 have also to cope with new living arrangements. Their private schools are located a long distance from their home communities, making children's daily commuting unfeasible. As a result, they are placed in hostels near the private school or seek support from extended family members. These children are therefore required to make further adaptations to living away from home and in a new environment. When recalling her son's transition to the hostel, Vishnu's mother explained, 'He did cry... it took one week for him to adjust. Whenever I go, he would cry always, on every visit of mine.'

The new living arrangements often require children to learn new skills in managing themselves (e.g., personal grooming, readying clothes, keeping track of books), although staff are on hand to help them with the grooming process and getting ready for school. Often children in hostels or staying with other relatives are introduced to new food habits as well. This might incur negative or positive responses. Vishnu, for example, talked of the variety of foods that he enjoys at the hostel, which are not generally prepared at his home. His mother mentioned that Vishnu asks for similar foods when he comes home during school holiday.

Two of the four children in this trajectory described how after the first few weeks at the new school and hostel, they started liking the school as a result of the quality of care and education that the teachers provide them, the facilities that are available and the variety of food that is provided. Children described being fascinated by access to various facilities which are not available in their home environments, like having a bed of their own and using flush toilets. It is worth recognising that it is not just children but also their caregivers who must learn to live apart from each other. Vishnu's father describes how difficult it was for his child to stay in the hostel and live apart from his family even when Vishnu liked the school very much:

Interviewer: Did he cry after going there [hostel] from here?

Vishnu's Father: He did cry (uh).

Interviewer: Did he get adjusted there?

Father: It took one week for him to adjust. Whenever I go, he would cry always, on every visit of mine.

Interviewer: Does he say that he would come back?

Father: He would cry, but he likes it [the hostel]. He cries when I go there.

(Source: Interview with Vishnu's caregivers, Poompuhar)

This account underscores that childhood educational (and other) transitions are not experienced in a 'vacuum' by children; they are shared experiences that involve and impact on a host of actors, including children, their families, friends and teachers (Vogler et al. 2008). The account above also illustrates transitions as *processes* of change, in that children who experience difficulties initially may eventually adapt and adjust to their new learning environments.

3.4 Trajectory 4: Government pre-school to government hostel

Chandini, the first of two daughters of a family from the Jatapu sub-sect of tribes in Patna,¹² first attended the *anganwadi* located in her home community. She then attended the local primary school for just a few days, until she secured admission into the school *cum* hostel run by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA).¹³ This *gurukulam*, which literally means a learning centre, exclusively for girls, was recently established by the ITDA in view of the growing demand for such schools. The *gurukulam* is a residential school which aims to provide for all of the needs of the children, including spiritual education. Chandini's stay at the hostel requires her to manage all of her personal work herself, including grooming, getting ready for school, washing and maintaining her clothes and washing her eating dish. She also needs to manage her books and all other belongings.

Chandini says that she does not like her school but she has not told her mother this. When asked why she hasn't told her mother of her dislike, Chandini explained: 'Well, it's like this: we'll have to pay money if I leave the school. We'll have to pay money, ma'am, to get the name removed.' Chandini stated in the interview: 'I remember my mother a lot, ma'am.'

(Source: Interview with Chandini, Patna)

Chandini is currently the only child in the qualitative sub-study who experienced this particular school trajectory, so it is difficult to generalise from her experience to other children in the community. Nonetheless, several caregivers with whom we spoke in her community aspired for their children to join the ITDA schools in the future. We expect that in follow-up research trips over the next two to three years, we will find more children having shifted to the

12 The Jatapu sub-sect of tribes are relatively better placed socio-economically than the people of the Savara sub-sect.

13 The Integrated Tribal Development Agency is a government body, established especially for the development of the tribal population and functions in areas populated by tribal groups. The body assumes responsibility for the overall development of the tribal population.

ITDA hostels. As not all of them succeed in getting this admission straight away, they may keep trying for several years. For instance, Saroja's mother is trying hard to secure her admission in the same *mini-gurukulam*, and says that Saroja will attend the local government primary school only until this admission is obtained. Interviews with parents of case study children suggest a multitude of reasons why they want their children to attend these special hostels. These include their availability and access, the intention to protect girls from community influences and the desire for different futures for them, as they are often the first generation to be educated.

4. Discussion: Linking ECCE trajectories and transitions

The Young Lives quantitative and qualitative data reveal what might be regarded as both successes and challenges in early childhood care and education in Andhra Pradesh. On the positive side, 87% of the Young Lives cohort of 5- to 6-year-old children have attended some form of pre-school before entering primary school. Furthermore, rates of pre-school participation are relatively similar among urban and rural children, as well as among boys and girl, and even quite similar among children from households of different economic statuses. This implies basic equity of access to pre-school in the state. However, causes for concern arise when noting the important and patterned variations in types and quality of pre-schools and primary schools attended by children in rural and urban areas and children from households of different economic statuses. For instance, the finding that 83% of children from less poor households in urban areas attended private pre-schools stands in stark contrast to the figure of 20% of children from the poorest households. Children of the poorest households mainly attend government pre-schools, and overwhelmingly so in the rural areas: about 80% of the poorest rural children attended government pre-schools, as did 64% of the poorest urban children (Woodhead et al. 2009). There are multiple reasons for these patterns of access, related to what is available to parents and what is affordable, but especially to parents' priorities for children's learning. While perceptions of relative quality certainly play a big part in parental decision-making, it would be a mistake to assume one provision is overall higher in quality in any objective sense. What is clear is that the availability of choice to some parents (especially urban and better resourced parents) has the consequence of children embarking on markedly divergent educational trajectories, right from the beginning of their schooling. This certainly should stimulate further considerations of what is gained or lost by children who attend these different private and government pre-schools. Do such differences in ECCE exacerbate later-life inequities between rural and urban and poor and poorer children?

Furthermore, this study's qualitative investigation of parents' decision making regarding early education as well as children's and families' experiences of children's pre-school and primary school trajectories, indicate important discrepancies in opinions concerning the quality of pre-schools and primary schools, the relative efficacy of pre-schools supporting children's readiness for primary schools, and the ease of children's adjustments to primary education. *Anganwadis* have historically played a major role in supporting the health and development of millions of children through the ICDS programme. The programme still serves a valuable function in offering nutritional supplement for the poorest families, but the evidence of Young Lives research suggests for most parents, priorities have shifted, and these traditional functions for *anganwadis* are no longer seen as sufficient. In a competitive economic climate,

and a fast growing economy, parents see the failure to specifically prepare children for school as a significant shortcoming of *anganwadis*. The conviction in this guardian's point of view is representative:

Interviewer: Let us now talk about Shanmukha Priya's education. What do you think is the advantage of *anganwadi*?

Mother: There is no specific advantage, not much contribution.

Interviewer: Like getting prepared for regular school?

Mother: But they don't care, right. They don't teach at all. No preparation, hence we have changed the school.

(Source: Interview with Shanmuka Priya's mother, rural Poompuhar)

There is also evidence that *anganwadi* workers and their helpers receive minimal support to carry out their jobs, often working in inadequate spaces and for little pay. There were mixed feelings from children about their *anganwadi* experiences, though the fact that some of the case study children reported returning to their previous *anganwadis* even after transitioning to first grade indicates some degree of attachment.

This research found that parents are ambitious and creative in their efforts to secure their children's early education. Aspirations for educational success were shown to be generated early on for children, with decisions made in the first decade of children's lives often envisioned as part of a longer educational trajectory. While some, and especially poor rural families, are putting their children in whatever local institutions they can afford, other caregivers are sending pre-school-aged children to stay with relatives where they can access better quality services, and many others are putting their children in primary schools (government and private) several years before they are actually eligible to join. Indeed, this last strategy was found to be very popular. The Young Lives 2006/7 survey found that 44% of the study's Younger Cohort was already in primary school, even though only 20% had reached the minimum entrance age of 5. This strategy is used much more by the poorest families in the sample: 51% of children from the poorest households were enrolled in primary school compared to 30.78% of children from the richest households. This could indicate that this is a strategy employed by families who cannot afford private schools to maximise their children's early exposure to formal schooling, which is not provided through *anganwadis*, with the added attraction of the free midday meal. Relatively wealthier families are also electing against *anganwadis* and directly enrolling in private primary schools when children reach 5 years or earlier.

The choices made about pre-school placements by some caregivers reflects a concern with how children's early education experiences will ready them, or not, for their primary education. The few cases captured in the qualitative sub-study of caregivers enrolling children in *anganwadis* until the children are deemed 'ready' for primary school, and then enrolling these children in private primary schools at a significant cost to their families, seem to demonstrate a deliberate attempt to manage children's transitions into primary education. In many different cases, caregivers explain their enrolment of their children in pre-schools or primary schools as informed by their own assessments of the child's readiness to benefit from these different levels of early education and/or care.

Finally, this research has identified the growing practice of sending very young children to hostels linked to both government and private schools. The reasons may be partly practical, because of the distance between children's homes and the school of choice. But for some parents, the opportunity for their children to move out of their community full time into a

residential situation with new and (they hope) positive influences, is seen as a first step towards a better, more highly educated, future than would be possible if they stayed within their village. Whatever the motives of parents, there is a significant impact on children, from separation from familiar surroundings and coping with the demands of living in a hostel.

It has been asserted by other ECCE researchers that children's experiences of their first transitions into schools significantly affect how they will navigate their future experiences of learning (Burrell and Bubb 2000; Fabian and Dunlop 2002; Dunlop and Fabian 2003). This qualitative study has uncovered some relatively smooth transitions, whereby children and their parents report no difficulties in adjusting to their new primary school environments, as well as some difficult transitions in which children experienced shock, fear, unhappiness, and confusion as a result of experiencing very different educational conditions in their new schools, (and in some cases hostels) including the requirement for long hours of concentration and receiving physical punishment from teachers.

Responsibility for children's transition experiences are shared by the pre-school and primary school environments that children attend, as well as by the variously weak and/or rigid regulative and governance structures that aggravate the challenges for children and families. The challenge of transition is exacerbated in some primary schools by the rigidity in the immediate absorption of children into full-day learning schedules, an unfamiliar language of instruction, strict disciplinary expectations and in some cases harsh repercussions for transgressions. On the other hand, despite the apparently stark differences between some of the institutions described here, there also emerged evidence of links between them. For example, it was often the *anganwadi* worker who took responsibility, when the time came, for registering children in first grade. Children's practices also pointed to a degree of fluidity in their transitions from one institution to the next. For example, the primary school children who returned daily to their former *anganwadis* in order to eat the nutritional supplement, and those children in hostels who often over-stayed their holiday periods to spend more time at home and avoid returning to the hostel, and of course, the children who moved from one kind of school to the next within the same academic year (e.g. from *anganwadi* to private school).

The finding that it is most usually poor rural children who are more prone to experiencing unsettling transitions into primary school seems to bode ill for ECCE's ability to serve its main purpose of encouraging these children's future positive orientations to schooling. As the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (2008) warns, while early childhood service coverage is certainly expanding, good quality services remain inaccessible to the most disadvantaged children of the poorest countries. Such inaccessibility of good quality early education services and experiences may perpetuate inequities further along children's educational trajectories. This is no small matter with an estimated 10.2 million children (aged 3 to 6 years) in India experiencing their pre-school stage in *anganwadis* (Mohite and Bhatt 2008).

Young Lives cannot yet provide evidence on whether these early education experiences will affect long-term outcomes, such as staying in school, performance, cognitive development, sociability, self-esteem, and so on, but the study will continue to monitor and measure these outcomes and be able to compare back to these early education experiences.

It is important to recall that India's National Policy on Education and Programme of Action conceptualises ECCE as focused around play and the individuality of children without deliberate emphasis on formal learning content, like reading, writing and arithmetic. Better quality *anganwadis* might provide such informal and relaxed play-focused environments for children, but many are providing very little educational content at all, which is not consistent with what parents say they value for their children's pre-school education. In fact, parents

overwhelmingly prioritised pre-schools which were oriented to readying children for their successful performance in primary school. By reporting these discrepancies between parental expectations and current policies and practices in pre-school and primary schools, we are not suggesting that the only conclusion is that *anganwadis* be reformed towards teaching school readiness, or that government schools embrace English medium. School policies are not solely determined by parental wishes, but also by political and professional beliefs about what is appropriate for this age group and how early education interconnects with later schooling. There is urgent need for debate and for reform in the regulation of private primary schools as much as for the rejuvenation of ICDS *anganwadis* and the strengthening of quality in government schools.

Finally, if we ask 'are schools ready for children?', the answer is largely that they are not. On the contrary, they expect children to fit into the system and in some cases, multiple school systems. The school, either private (limited to the type of private schools that the Young Lives sample children attend) or government, does little to make the school ready for children. As long as this doesn't change, many children will still face 'interrupted' or 'discontinuous' transitions which may affect their performance and progression in school later on. If we turn the question around and ask how far pre-school education helps make children 'ready for school', the answer would appear to be that this is true, to some degree in general developmental terms, but much less in terms of activity based learning, cognitive skills or familiarity with basic school expectations. To conclude, pre-schools potentially play an important role in preparing children (and their families) for the transition to primary school and primary schools play an important role in receiving them. In view of the complex, diverse and potentially divisive experiences of children and their families discussed in this paper, we suggest that policies and programmes be revisited and investments for early childhood education enhanced in such a way that is more equitable, taking into account children's and adult's perspectives and experiences of transitions to primary school, as well as targeting the most disadvantaged groups of children.

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Appendix 1

Community descriptions

Polur

This is the only urban community amongst the four qualitative field work sites. It is an informal settlement with a mainly Muslim population. The population is approximately 2,000 living in 400 houses. It is an overcrowded locality with narrow lanes and stagnant water. The houses have poor ventilation and sanitation facilities. Residents are employed as auto drivers, shopkeepers, domestic staff, shop workers, construction workers, etc. Being an urban slum in the heart of the state capital, residents have access to all the basic services. There are five private schools and three government schools. Being a Muslim locality, there are more than three mosques in the area, and studying Arabic and the Quran are major pursuits amongst local children.

Mayurbhanj

This rural community is situated in Anantapur district. Accessible by black top (tarmacked) road, it is at a distance of 40 kilometres from Guntakal, which is one of the state's major railway junctions. In 2000/1, Mayurbhanj was divided into two villages separated by about half a kilometre as a result of caste conflicts in the area. Now there is 'new Mayurbhanj' and an 'old Mayurbhanj' with 200 households in each. The major castes in the village are Boya Caste and Scheduled Caste. There are also five households belonging to the Forward Caste, and these families dominate in the village due to their caste and land holdings. Agriculture and agricultural labour is the main source of livelihood in this community. Livestock rearing is also one of the major occupations. A drought prone area, all the crops are dependent on the rainfall. During the non-agricultural season, most of the inhabitants attend to the labour work provided under the government's employment guarantee scheme. Some of the families also migrate to the nearby villages, towns and cities in search of food and work during the non-agricultural season.

In old Mayurbhanj, there is a government upper primary school which runs classes up to Standard 7. Midday meals are provided to the school children. Children continue their high school education at the nearby high school, which is approximately three kilometres away from the village. Since this school is at a distance from the village and the route to the school is also quite deserted, many of the village girls discontinue their education after primary school. There is also a pre-school in this village.

Poompuhar

This rural community is comprised of 463 families with a total population of 2,040. The majority speak Telugu and the dominant group is of the Backward Castes who belong to the Hindu religion. There are also a sizeable number of Scheduled Caste households in the community who are located in a specific area at the entrance of the community. (However, there are no children from this social group in this study sample). The community is accessible by black top roads and is well connected by scheduled bus trips and private transport systems. The major occupations are in agriculture, livestock and daily wage labour. Child labour is engaged for cotton harvesting, and children (mostly girls) are out of school for 2 to 3 months each year to work in the cotton fields. Seasonal migration (February/May until

June/July) is common, with adults moving to distant places for labour and leaving their children and aged parents behind in the village.

The village has access to most basic services, including electricity, drinking water, drainage, a health centre, religious institutions, etc. It is also covered under different government programmes, including food assistance, educational assistance, health services, natural resource management and other social security programmes. The community has two *anganwadis* (pre-schools) and a high school which are run by the government.

Patna

Patna is a tribal community in the Srikakulam district. The area contains 1,056 families with a population of 4,455. The dominant group belong to the Forward Caste, are Hindu and speak Telegu, though they are fewer in number than the Scheduled Tribes in the area (the Savara and Jathapu). The Jathapu people generally have higher social status and speak the same language as the people living in the plains area. The Savara people have a different language and script.

The community is in a hilly area. Agriculture, horticulture and non-timber forest produce (NTFP) are the prime sources of income to the people living in these communities. The Government had assigned one to three acres of dry land to Scheduled Tribe families for horticulture. This area is suitable for growing cashew, mango and pineapple, pulses, cereals and commercial crops like turmeric. The integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) is an important source of employment to the youths who are being employed as community teachers in large numbers. Most habitations accessible though the internal approach roads are difficult to travel. Road connectivity is limited to scheduled bus trips and so people walk long distances to reach their destinations. The community is often affected by cyclones and roads can be cut off by water flowing from the hills.

The community has access to basic services such as religious institutions, public internet, drinking water, government and private schools, pre-school, electricity, etc. *Anganwadis* are accessible to almost all the communities in the area, though they may not be located within the same village. Savara children often find it difficult to cope in school as they are taught in Telugu. The government therefore has made special arrangements for books to be provided in the Savara language and teachers trained in this language.

Young Lives is an innovative long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty.

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Young Lives is coordinated by a small team based at the University of Oxford, led by Jo Boyden.

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Department of International Development
University of Oxford, UK

Statistical Services Centre,
University of Reading, UK

Save the Children UK
(staff from the Rights and Economic
Justice team in London as well as staff
in India, Ethiopia and Vietnam).

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